

Nurturing Critical Consciousness through Faith: *Integrating Fitrah-Based Education in the Transformation of Islamic Early Childhood Education*

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Abstract— Early childhood Islamic education is important because it influences children's spirituality, character, and worldview. However, in practice, many early childhood education institutions in Islamic countries are still oriented towards a memorization and dogmatic approach, which provides little space for the development of children's critical thinking from an early age. This article aims to examine the integration of a fitrah-based education approach in transforming early childhood Islamic education, with a focus on its potential to foster critical awareness rooted in faith. This study employs a qualitative method, drawing on literature reviews, a case study, and interviews with the management and a teacher of the BATAS Study. This early childhood education institution implements a fitrah-based education approach. The results of the study show that education based on fitrah can encourage children to think reflectively, understand values contextually, and internalize Islamic spirituality meaningfully. The main challenges include changing the role of teachers from being full authorities in learning to facilitators and nurturers of the child's maximum potential. The BATAS Study offers a real-life example of how integrating faith, freedom of thought, and emotional guidance can shape children into independent, empathetic, and socially aware individuals. This article recommends a more transformative and dialogical approach to Islamic education, one that humanizes children from an early age, aligning with their inherent nature.

Keywords: *Critical consciousness, Islamic early childhood education, fitrah-based education, transformative Islamic education*

I. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood Islamic education plays a vital role in shaping children's personalities, values, and thought processes from a young age (Fadhilah & Rafi'i, 2025). However, in practice, most Islamic Early Childhood educational institutions in Indonesia still focus on a purely cognitive approach rather than a holistic one. In theory, children's education in Islam is not just a formal learning process but a spiritual journey that encompasses all aspects of life. Islam teaches that children's education should be holistic, encompassing spiritual, intellectual, social, and moral development (Sukatin et al., 2023). Children's education should prioritize the importance of developing their potential as human beings and their capacity to learn, becoming valuable and useful members of both local and global society (Zuhdi & Dobson, 2022).

Often, early childhood education in Islamic institutions prioritizes memorization, formal obedience, and dogmatic repetition without providing space for children to understand values deeply and contextually (Sahin, 2018). Religious education is often simplified into memorizing short prayers, practicing worship, and engaging in minimal spiritual reflection, with little to no involvement of

children in dialogue about the meaning and understanding of what is being done. Children tend to perform rituals without understanding why they are required.

Amid rapid social, economic, and technological changes, this educational approach is becoming less relevant. Children live in a complex world and act ethically in various situations. Therefore, Islamic education needs to transform not only as a transmission of religious knowledge but also as a vehicle for the formation of living spirituality, social awareness, and reflective abilities that stem from nature and faith (Jamhari, 2009; Nasucha et al., 2023). This aligns with the views of thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman (1982), who emphasized that Islamic education must address the challenges of the times without compromising the core values of Islam.

In the context of Indonesia, the development of Islamic PAUD institutions is now becoming increasingly interesting due to their rapid growth (Wiyani, 2016; Nurlina et al., 2023). However, many of them have not touched on the critical pedagogy approach or education as a practice of liberation (Sahin, 2018). Many teachers still assume the role of sole authority, and children are passive recipients rather than active participants in the learning process (Djamdjuri & Rohmah, 2025). This creates a gap between the ideal of liberating Islamic education and the practice of Islamic education in the field.

The fitrah-based education approach emerged as an effort to reform Islamic education by emphasizing the development of children's natural potential, rooted in their inherent nature (Astuti, 2017). For instance, educating children is a method that promotes discovery, provokes curiosity, and begets a quest for spiritual and reflective meaning (Amir et al., 2024). Fitrah-based education also provides children with an opportunity to learn about their surroundings and themselves as part of God's creation, thereby fostering moral conduct, social consciousness, and spiritual development (Putri, 2016).

Thus, a primary challenge in the field of early childhood Islamic education is how to develop an authentic sense of religiosity that transcends coercion, fostering instead a reflective spirituality that remains flexible, and a sense of appreciation for lived values rather than shallow memorization (Sahin, 2018; Bano, 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the possibility of fitrah-based education as a liberating paradigm in early childhood Islamic education, enabling the development of critical consciousness (Irpan & Sain, 2024). Because early childhood Islamic education is often trapped in memorization and authoritarian methods, there is minimal space for critical thinking. This research can be a model that unites and integrates faith, freedom of thought, and social awareness from an early age. With the long-term goal of establishing Islamic institutions, early childhood education can adopt a transformative approach based on modern Islamic principles.

Research Questions

1. How is the concept of fitrah-based education understood and applied in the context of early childhood Islamic education?
2. How can the integration of security and fitrah values shape critical awareness in early childhood?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a fitrah-based education approach that also fosters reflective and ethical awareness in children?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the concept and implementation of fitrah-based education in the context of early childhood Islamic education.
2. To analyze how the integration of faith and fitrah can foster critical awareness in children
3. To explain the relevance and potential of this approach as a form of transformational Islamic education at the early childhood education level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Transformative Islamic Education

Fazlur Rahman (1982) made the case for contextual Islamic education that can address the challenges of the times without compromising its ethical values. Rahman emphasized that Islamic education should integrate religious and general knowledge, thereby avoiding the dichotomy that often occurs in the Islamic education system (Anggraini et al., 2023; Dinata et al., 2023). Fazlur Rahman argued that Islamic education should produce integrative human beings who not only possess knowledge but also exhibit moral and spiritual awareness (Kartikasari, 2019).

Meanwhile, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1999) developed the concept of ta'dib as an educational process that unites knowledge, manners, and wisdom, then emphasizes the importance of spirituality and the formation of a perfect human being. al-Attas (1999) added a social-ethical dimension, stating that Islamic education must foster awareness of social responsibility and justice. In this perspective, the transformation of Islamic education involves spiritual, intellectual, and social praxis dimensions (Fauzi & Usman, 2024).

Rahman (1982) proposed an approach that would enable Islamic education to remain relevant in the modern world while preserving its moral and spiritual values. Rahman saw education as a tool for social transformation, where learners not only understand Islam intellectually but also internalize the values of justice and social responsibility (Hidayat et al., 20204). Islamic education should instill in children the values of honesty, accountability, and empathy from an early age, enabling them to develop a strong moral foundation.

In the context of early childhood education, this transformative approach can be applied by combining Islamic values with science, social, and life skills learning so that children understand that science and religion complement each other. Rahman emphasized the importance of critical awareness in Islamic education so that students do not only receive teachings passively but are also able to think reflectively and creatively (Hidayat et al., 2024). This learning can be applied by encouraging children to ask questions, discuss, and understand Islamic concepts more deeply, not just memorize but also experience real-life applications in the learning process.

2.2 The concept of Critical Pedagogy and its impact on Children's Consciousness

As discussed by Paulo Freire in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), education must be a practice of liberation, not oppression. He promoted the theory of conscientization, which involves obtaining awareness and transforming one's social world (Qasserras, 2023). Taking a critical approach in the context of early childhood education does not imply the introduction of complex problems. Instead, it requires stimulating the spirit of inquiry, the ability to question, provoking thoughts about oneself,

and developing sentiments of compassion toward others. Incorporating Islamic ideals would add a level of spirituality that would enhance this learning process.

In Islam, education is not only aimed at transferring knowledge but also at shaping character and morals, which aligns with Freire's idea of education as a tool of liberation. Raihani (2020) proposes in her article that Islamic education should integrate the values of social justice rather than just teaching religious dogma. With the critical pedagogy approach, students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and understand how social systems can impact their lives. Islamic education based on critical awareness can help children develop reflective thinking rather than simply accepting teachings without question. Therefore, teachers who apply critical pedagogy can create an inclusive and dialogical learning environment, enabling students to connect Islamic values with the social challenges they face.

Islam itself asks us to think and to reflect, it is stated in the Quran that Allah repeatedly mentions that we have to think, or Allah also gives us reflective questions that we need to answer. Allah, as the divine educator, teaches humans as learners. It is emphasized by Quranic verses which frequently mention 'don't you think?' 'Don't you see?'.

"Have you considered the water that you drink? Do you think that we cause it to descend from the clouds? Or do you think that we are the ones who cause it to descend?" (Quran 56: 68-69)

"Have you considered the fire that you light? Do you think that we are the ones who cause it to burn?" (Quran 56: 70-77)

Islam is all about education and Allah is the divine educator. Humans are the students and Quran is the book, then childhood is an orientation phase to learn and grasp from the surroundings.

Hussien (2007) also compares critical theory in Western education with Islamic educational philosophy, demonstrating that both share similarities in their goals of emancipation and social justice. Hussien (2007) proposes that Islamic education should integrate the values of social justice, not just teach religious dogma, without inviting reason to think critically and create dialogue. Given that learning in Islamic education institutions often occurs in isolation, the most relevant part of Freire's thinking on Islamic education is the discussion of the role of dialogue in education (Sayilgan, 2020). Freire criticized the "banking model" of education and advocated for a dialogical model, where students are not merely objects but active participants alongside the teacher. He also believed that dialogical education is the key to critical thinking.

Sahin (2018) developed the concept of critical religious consciousness, which is an awareness of faith that is not dogmatic but rather alive and contextual and can serve as the basis for social ethics. Sahin believes that Islamic education should not only instill faith passively but also open up space for students to ask questions, reflect, and personally and socially internalize the meaning of faith. Regarding the tendency in early childhood education to rely on teachers, namely teacher-centred approaches, Sahin proposes that student-centred approaches are more appropriate because they help children form independence and make conscious decisions.

2.3 Fitrah-Based Education

According to the general concept of Islam, humans possess a natural tendency (Fitrah in Arabic) toward monotheism from birth. This implies that monotheistic religions reflect the innate human inclination toward faith in God Almighty. Islam, as a natural religion, not only accommodates human diversity but also supports its growth and development. Thus, human existence will be more perfect when aligned with their true personality.

The concept of education based on this natural tendency (Fitrah) has two main objectives (Astuti, 2017). First, education triggers and encourages the growth and development of good personalities that stem from the natural tendencies of students. A favourable personality has two main dimensions: the social dimension and the personal dimension, which lead to self-awareness. By having self-awareness, students are expected to have basic potential that must be developed optimally. Second, returning to the concept of Oneness, the universe becomes a means of worship in Islam and a source of learning for students.

Fitrah-based education posits that every child is born with a unique fitrah, which encompasses faith, capacity for learning, leadership potential, and a sense of purpose and meaning. Education must cultivate this potential, not suppress or homogenize it. The approach emphasizes context and meaningful learning based on direct experience, with a loving relationship between children and teachers. Thus, education based on fitrah can serve as a platform for developing children's critical thinking consciousness within an Islamic spiritual context.

The hadith also upholds the existing concept of fitrah, stating that all children are born in fitrah. Moreover, it is narrated from Abu Hurairah also that the Messenger of Allah SAW said,

كُلُّ إِنْسَانٍ تَلَدُهُ أُمُّهُ عَلَى الْفِطْرَةِ، فَأَبَوَاهُ يُهَوِّدَانِهِ أَوْ يُنَصِّرَانِهِ أَوْ يُمَجِّسَانِهِ

“No human being is born except he is born on fitrah. Then both of his parents are the ones who make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Zoroastrian.”

The hadith emphasizes the significant influence of parents on their children, not only physically and biologically but also mentally and spiritually. It can be colored by their parents, who have an essential role. Children respond to adults based on how they behave, which influences their world, development, and the way they understand things, whether something is to be feared or safe. We cannot neglect how we present ourselves as parents. Parents and the surrounding community also have a responsibility to provide a favorable influence and a proper education to their children.

Other studies have shown that fitrah-based education has a positive impact on building parent-child relationships, particularly in the context of homeschooling (Salma & Veni, 2024). Through the consistent development of daily routines, children can grow emotionally, socially, and spiritually by embracing Islamic values. Fitrah-based education encompasses not only the curriculum but also the application of these values in everyday life.

Again, the interpretation of Surah Ar-Rum, verse 30, cements the idea. The word fitrah is also written in the Quran, Surah Ar-Rum, verse 30, which means,

“So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most people are unaware of this”. (QS. Ar-Rum: 30).

The philosophy of fitrah-based education develops children's innate potential through a natural approach that integrates faith, reason, and life skills.

One of the ethical boundaries for protecting children's fitrah is by avoiding threat-based learning (Camilia et al, 2025). This is contradictory to what happens in early childhood Islamic educational institutions, which often emphasize coercion and enticement in learning so that children obey and carry out activities.

Islamic education based on *fitrah* should be conducted in a fun and engaging manner, utilizing child development, exploration, and game-based learning methods to foster a more profound understanding of the subject matter. This approach aims to help children recognize and develop their *fitrah* naturally, without the pressure that can hinder their spiritual and intellectual development (Camilia et al., 2025).

Fitrah-based education contributes to the development of religious values in children by adopting an approach that taps into their natural potential and avoids methods that force or suppress them, thereby consciously fostering their maximum potential. Teachers play a role not only as knowledge givers but also as nurturers of nature. In the context of *fitrah*-based education, education is not merely a “transfer of knowledge,” which emphasizes the transmission of information from teacher to student; rather, it is more about the “transfer of training,” which focuses on forming habits, character, and ways of thinking aligned with Islamic values, aiming to create learning outcomes that are beneficial for meeting the demands of contemporary Islamic civilization (Astuti, 2017).

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, intrinsic case study approach (Stake, 1995), incorporating both a literature review and a case study method, which aims to explore in depth how the *fitrah*-based education approach is integrated into early childhood Islamic education practices to foster critical awareness and children's spirituality. The case studied specifically is the BATAS Study institution, an early childhood Islamic school in Jakarta that implements a curriculum based on *fitrah* and Islamic dialogical values. Data sources include documents and information from the official websites of early childhood Islamic educational institutions that implement *fitrah*-based education, as well as articles, interviews, and supporting publications, if available. Additional theoretical literature from educational thinkers such as Paulo Freire (1970), Fazlur Rahman (1982), Naquib al-Attas (1999), and Abdullah Sahin (1998) is combined with the literature on the *fitrah*-based education approach.

Participants consist of two sources: the founder and teacher in early childhood education programs. Participants were selected purposively (Creswell, 2014) because they were considered to have a deep understanding of the curriculum approach and the implementation of *fitrah* values and critical pedagogy within the Islamic context. The data collection technique will be conducted through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, based on the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): becoming familiar with the data through re-reading transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the context. The initial coding process involved marking data units that were relevant to the research questions. The process of theme search involves grouping codes into initial themes, such as reflection on faith, the role of teachers, dialogic spirituality, and practical challenges.

The analysis is conducted descriptively and critically, employing a thematic interpretation approach, to explore main themes such as spirituality, critical awareness, and liberation in the educational practices of the Islamic Institution of Early Childhood Education. Researchers will also compare this approach with the conventional Islamic early childhood education approach in Indonesia to highlight its potential for transformation. The researcher also reflected on potential bias through reflexive journaling during the analysis process. This study has received verbal consent from the participants, and their identities have been disguised to maintain confidentiality and adhere to research ethics.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Integration of nature and faith as the foundation of reflective education*

Based on the results of the literature and case studies from the BATAS study, it is evident that integrating nature and faith offers a unique and contextual approach to supporting the process of child growth and development. Rather than emphasizing only cognitive and memorization aspects, this approach prioritizes children's spiritual experiences as a foundation for understanding the world and acting ethically. Teachers at BATAS explained that the spiritual approach is not carried out through threats or indoctrination but rather through critical dialogue and reflection to gain an understanding tailored to the child's age. For example, when a child asks about nature or encounters an angry friend, the teacher facilitates the child's thinking and feeling through a critical perspective using nature-based education.

This reinforces the arguments of Paulo Freire (1970) and Abdullah Sahin (2018) regarding the importance of critical dialogue in dialogical education, where students are not passive recipients but active subjects who can interpret and reflect on the spiritual and social realities of their lives. This demonstrates that the transformation of Islamic education, which is often considered teacher-centered, can be shifted to a student-centered approach.

The educational approach at BATAS Study is based on the idea that every child is born with a natural disposition, namely spiritual and moral potential, that must be nurtured, not suppressed. The founder of BATAS said that the establishment of this school was motivated by a frightening and stressful experience of religious education:

"Initially, it was because we saw our own experience of how we used to study religion, but were forced, beaten with rattan; we wanted to make children study religion without fear of being wrong, and learning the Quran and reciting the Quran is not scary but fun."

It is also stated by the teacher that the learning process in early childhood education should be fun, allowing children to grasp the material through happiness.

"The role of BATAS teachers is to make the learning process enjoyable so that learning about religion and reciting the Quran is not a tense or traumatic experience."

BATAS Study bases its curriculum on the natural disposition towards monotheism or the Oneness of God and integrates it with the IEYC (International Early Years Curriculum) which is a research-based curriculum for young learners from the UK that emphasizes holistic development, playful learning, and a broad range of skills. Teachers act as facilitators who accompany the learning process warmly rather than as intimidating authorities. Teachers do not use threats such as *"if you do not do it, you will go to hell,"* but the approach is emphasized with the love of Allah:

"Usually, we say, What's it called? Let's pray; if you don't pray, you'll go to hell. Oh, that threat. This is a threat. Instead of saying that, let's pray. We need Allah, emphasizing that Allah is Most Gracious and Most Merciful. It's just that there are stages in Fitrah-Based Education according to their age. Fitrah-Based Education emphasizes faith in children, in terms of faith."

"...Yes, Allah does punish, but instead of saying that Allah is the punisher, we emphasize first that Allah is Rahman, Rahim, and so on. Allah is the most loving and merciful. We need Allah, emphasizing that Allah is Most Gracious and Most Merciful. It's just that there are stages in Fitrah-Based Education according to their age."

This approach aligns with Sahin's (2018) approach, faith is not merely an accumulation of doctrine but a process of spiritual growth formed through experience, dialogue, and action. Sahin (2018) also emphasizes the importance of epistemological openness—namely, openness in thinking—so that children can understand faith as a whole in a world that is constantly changing. It is closely aligned

with Al-Attas' thoughts on *ta'dib*, which emphasizes education that not only conveys knowledge but also cultivates noble manners and spirituality.

4.2 *Spiritual practices that encourage independence and understanding of values*

One thing that emerged strongly in interviews with the founders of BATAS was their desire to break the chain of Islamic education that emphasizes fear of abstract things for young children, such as sin, hell, and so on. Then, replace it with an approach of love for Allah, love for His creatures, and how he can be socially responsible. They want children to know Allah as a source of compassion, not just as a figure to be feared.

This approach builds faith-based consciousness, not as dogma, but as a source of reflection and inner strength. Naquib al-Attas (1999) also emphasizes this kind of spirituality in the concept of *ta'dib*, where spiritual education forms manners and awareness of social responsibility. Interviews with teachers also confirmed that the approach taken by BATAS facilitates children to understand why a value or practice is so significant, not just to carry it out:

“Because it makes them think critically. Because we want to find out about it, does the child build critical awareness? Like, are our children aware of it? Don't just do it because you're afraid. Don't just do it because I don't understand what it's for. What's the purpose of praying, for example? I checked. Oh, children know that praying is just a routine, but don't know what it means, for example. The point is to create a dialogue with the children.”

This demonstrates that BATAS's spiritual approach fosters character development and self-reflection rather than merely formal obedience. Freire calls this education the practice of freedom, where the subject of learning has agency and full awareness in doing so. Building critical awareness early on through reflective questions. This approach reflects Sahin's (2018) idea of critical religious consciousness. Faith is not instilled through fear but through meaningful experiences and reflection. Teachers act as spiritual facilitators who create space for dialogue and emotional involvement in children rather than as guardians of doctrine.

Although many are quite skeptical that young children are not yet capable of critical thinking, the practice at BATAS shows otherwise. The BATAS Study provides a structured space for children to ask questions, think critically, and engage in dialogue. Teachers report that children can ask reflective questions, such as the following,

“Well, there are some like why Allah exists, right? Why do we emphasize this to encourage children to think critically? Then, questions that start with 'why' and 'how'? The children there are critical and unimaginable. We should consider how to answer if some students ask us, 'Why, how is it that Allah exists?’”

The Prophet Muhammad said that *“Verily, gentleness is not found in anything but that it beautifies it, and it is not removed from anything but that it disgraces it.”* (Muslim)

The teacher responds to these questions with a gentle, contextual, metaphorical approach.

“Oh, so this is it, you see, it's like you know the wind, the wind is there, but it's not visible, like Allah. Oh, it's there, but it's not visible. That's a metaphor, using a metaphor. The teacher responds to these questions with a gentle, contextual, metaphorical approach. The answer can usually be linked to Fitrah-based education. Do you understand? Yes, it's still related to Allah's creation, Fitrah-based education, which is essentially the purest form of Allah's creation, reflecting the essence of Allah who created it. We can feel it, but we can't see Allah. It's like that”

Questions and responses like these emerge from a safe, open, and meaningful learning environment. Teachers do not provide absolute answers but rather invite children to explore feelings, experiences, and moral values. This aligns with Freire's concept of conscientization, which, in the context of early childhood education, can take the form of reflecting on everyday experiences, fostering empathy and

concern, and asking questions through dialogue rather than passively receiving information. The education provided by BATAS Study does not encourage empty memorization but rather the exploration of meaning and the formation of reflective spiritual awareness.

This aligns with Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, which is the process of becoming aware of social and spiritual realities and acting based on understanding rather than fear or doctrine. As Sahin (2018) said, faith should grow through authentic relationships, life experiences, and openness to questions. At BATAS, this is evident in play-based learning activities, discussions about goodness, and spiritual strengthening, all of which occur without the use of threats.

During the *Halal Cooking* activity with the theme “Cooking Halal Muffins,” the teacher does not immediately provide technical instructions. She begins with a reflective dialogue: *“What is the difference between regular flour and flour with a halal logo? Why do we need to make sure these ingredients are halal?”* Fatimah (pseudonym, 5 years old) answers, *“If there is a halal logo, it means Allah allows us to eat!”* The teacher then invites the children to touch, smell, and observe the texture of the ingredients while asking, *“If we use non-halal butter, what effect do you think it will have on our bodies?”* Ali (pseudonym, 4.5 years old) comments, *“Later we will have a stomachache... and Allah is sad because we do not take care of ourselves!”* The activity continues by mixing the ingredients while humming a phrase of gratitude: *“Alhamdulillah, Allah gave us fresh eggs!”* At the end of the session, the teacher guides the reflection: *“Earlier, when the muffins were cooked, we said, ‘Bismillah’ before eating. In your opinion, why is that important?”* Aisyah (5 years old) answers, *“So that Allah is happy... and we remember that food is His sustenance!”*

Food and beverage processing activities utilize halal and thayyib ingredients as the primary learning pillars. The class provides a basic introduction to the texture of ingredients, nutrition, and recipes that are connected to the value of tauhid, emphasizing to children that the food ingredients they consume are part of Allah’s power. The dialogic approach enables children to understand the concept of halal as a manifestation of Allah’s concern, while developing a critical awareness of the impact of food choices on both the body and spirituality. This realizes Sahin’s (2018) principle of authentic experience-based religious education.

4.3 Batas Study as a Transformative Islamic Education Model

The acronym BATAS Study represents the phrase Based on Nature and Tauhid in Daily Activities. This context presents the BATAS Study as an innovative initiative in early childhood Islamic education. Founded in 2021, BATAS Study combines the fitrah-based education approach with Islamic spiritual values in a reflective, contextual, and participatory learning ecosystem. This approach enables children to ask questions, explore, and develop values not through memorization but through an understanding of the meaning behind the learning. The BATAS Study aims to promote spiritual and intellectual transformation from an early age instead of giving the threat.

“Fitrah-Based Education emphasizes faith in children, in terms of faith. How do you do it? The way is by emphasizing positive verses first. Regarding this positive verse,.. where the approach was positive. Yes, Allah does punish, but instead of saying that Allah is the punisher, we emphasize first that Allah is Rahman, Rahim, and so on. Allah is the most loving and merciful.”

The BATAS philosophy refers to a holistic and personal approach to children as learning subjects who are spiritually, emotionally, physically, socially, and intellectually intact. Their central values are summarized in the acronym GUIDE: God, Utmost, Impactful, Developed, Engaged. The intriguing aspect is that the BATAS Study not only fosters children’s spirituality through religious

practices but also links it to the development of critical awareness. Children are encouraged to understand why a value is essential and how it can be applied in real life rather than just memorizing it. This approach aligns with the principle of critical consciousness (conscientization) introduced by Paulo Freire (1970), where education becomes a dialogical process that enables understanding of reality and conscious transformation. In this approach also in each stage has their transformation to learn.

“There were stages, such as the phase of introducing faith and the phase at the beginning of having fun, which served as an introduction. It emphasizes positive verses first rather than negative verses. . What do you mean, like between the processes, such as intercorrelating? That's how it is.”

BATAS does not prioritize memorization or drilling but encourages children to explore, ask questions, create, and reflect on it. The learning methods used involve a project-based approach, exploratory play, nature-based activities, and the integration of Islamic values into daily practice. Teachers act as facilitators, not one-way material providers. Warm and empathetic interactions between teachers and children are an essential foundation.

4.4 Challenges and opportunities for implementation

Although this approach has proven effective in the context of the BATAS Study, challenges remain, especially in the following areas:

- Availability of teachers who understand the philosophy of fitrah-based and critical pedagogy
- Readiness of parents and the community to accept non-dogmatic methods
- Evaluation and accreditation systems that still tend to be academic but do not reflect the spiritual and reflective aspects of children

However, this model opens up opportunities to design a more meaningful, dialogical, and humanistic early childhood Islamic curriculum. BATAS offers an integrative approach that combines faith, creativity, exploration, and learning through hands-on experiences. Activities such as halal cooking, nature exploration, and faith-based dialogue are integral to the learning process. Teachers as facilitators and a learning environment that is open to dialogue, this approach reflects the transformative Islamic education model as idealized by Fazlur Rahman (1982), namely one that is contextual, ethical, and empowering.

Rather than just emphasizing cognitive and memorization aspects, this approach prioritizes children's spiritual experiences as a foundation for ethically understanding the world. Teachers at BATAS explain that the spiritual approach is not carried out through threats or indoctrination, but rather through critical dialogue and reflection to gain an understanding that is tailored to the child's age. For example, when a child asks about nature or meets an angry friend, the teacher facilitates the child's thoughts and feelings through a critical perspective using nature-based education. This strengthens the arguments of Paulo Freire (1970) and Abdullah Sahin (2018) about the importance of critical dialogue in education, where students are not passive recipients but active subjects who can interpret and reflect on the spiritual and social realities of their lives.

V. LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this mini-study include the use of secondary data and a limited scope. This study examined only two participants, which limits its generalizability. The subjectivity of interview and observation data can provide bias. Other institutions may deem the findings less relevant due to the school atmosphere and limited resources.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that integrating the fitrah-based education approach in early childhood Islamic education has significant potential in fostering critical awareness rooted in faith and spirituality. The BATAS Study, as a case study, presents a transformative Islamic education model in early childhood education that emphasizes not only memorization or formal order but also reflective growth, understanding of values, and loving spiritual closeness.

Through interviews with the founder and teachers, it was found that this approach positions children as active and dignified learning subjects. Critical questions from children, such as “Why does God exist?” or “Why should we be grateful?” are not met with a response of labeling them as rebellious children or disrupting the learning process; instead, they must be embraced as a natural and constructive spiritual process. Teachers act as companions who provide a dialogical space, not as frightening authorities or ones that control only one way.

Within a theoretical framework, this finding aligns with Freire’s concept of conscientization, where education serves as a means of liberation, fostering social and spiritual awareness. The BATAS approach also reflects Al-Attas’ vision of education as a process of perfecting manners and Fazlur Rahman’s idea of the need for contextual Islamic education that is relevant to the realities of the times. The transformation of Islamic education is not enough just by changing the curriculum; it must also touch the paradigm of education itself, from an education that instills fear to one that fosters love, from an education that demands blind obedience to one that awakens active awareness and living faith.

The educational approach at BATAS Study is based on the idea that every child is born with a natural disposition, namely spiritual and moral potential, which must be nurtured, not suppressed. As seen, BATAS aims to make children know God as a source of compassion, not just a figure to be feared, which fosters faith-based awareness as a source of reflection and inner strength, rather than dogma. It is also stated that BATAS facilitates children’s understanding of why a value or practice is important, not just to carry it out, and focuses on building critical awareness early on through reflective questions. This illustrates how children’s critical questions are received and responded to, fostering critical awareness. The education provided by the BATAS Study does not encourage empty memorization but rather exploration of meaning and the formation of reflective spiritual awareness.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

For early childhood Islamic educational institutions, it is recommended to develop a curriculum based on natural values and a reflective approach and to prepare teachers with training in dialogical and liberating spiritual pedagogy. For education policymakers, it is essential to consider early childhood evaluation instruments that not only focus on academic aspects but also encompass all aspects holistically, including spiritual, social, and self-awareness. For further research, long-term studies are needed to investigate the impact of fitrah-based education on the development of character, empathy, and social awareness in children within the context of Islamic education.

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